

APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE 'NEW MIDDLE CLASS' IN ADVANCED CAPITALISM

Anthony Thomson

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Introduction

In contrast to European societies where the consciousness of class distinctions is embedded more deeply in the social fabric, in North America the absence of traditional relationships and the development of a pioneering ideology fostered a view of the continent as largely classless. Particular circumstances have nurtured this conception and it has appeared periodically in new forms more appropriate for prevailing conditions. During the hey-day of the industrial society theorists, the popular notion of a 'middle class society' was given academic legitimation. The view that everyone was becoming middle class represented the adoption of the language of class to deny the existence of class.

In the place of sharply differentiated class interests the industrial society thesis acknowledged only stratification dimensions such as occupational scales or statistical aggregates. It was acknowledged that the petite bourgeoisie had been considerably reduced in size and that the occupational structure contained many more employees than previously, but these tendencies had not produced the hypothesized polarisation. On the contrary, the social structure was becoming more, not less, complex. The expansion of juridical propertylessness for the majority had been overshadowed by processes tended to differentiate this enlarged grouping and had weakened to the point of extinction the cohesiveness and continuity of class as well as class awareness and consciousness.¹

While both independent commodity producers and the traditional blue-collar proletariat had declined, new groupings of commercial and service workers had emerged. In this century the proportion of employees engaged in what became known as 'white-collar' work -- from retail sales clerks to professionals and administrators -- tended to increase in the advanced industrial societies, although the relative extent varied between countries.² By 1970, about half of the Canadian labour force was employed in such occupations. Although these groupings shared with the traditional working class the necessity to sell their labour power on the market, historically other significant attributes had distinguished large numbers of them from manual workers, placing them in relatively superior positions.³ Descriptively, this economic grouping was separated from the proletariat by its possession of symbolic skills given institutional legitimation characterized as intellectual labour; by superior market capacities, working conditions and degrees of authority; by separate residential areas; by life-styles which were significantly different from the manual working class, and so

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on.⁴

At the time when their North American counterparts were devising a multi-dimensional analysis of social inequality, some European sociologists with a background in Marx scholarship were reasserting the importance of class analysis and attempting to account, within this restatement, for the changes which had occurred in the occupational structure. They identified this expanding stratum as a 'new middle class': a class of 'civil servants, trade union officials, local government officers..., technicians, white-collar workers and minor executives(5).⁵ Despite this early reiteration of the connection between radicalism and specifically class analysis, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the context of a practical renewal of trade union and workplace conflict, that the question of class became once again an important issue in sociological writing. Similarly, there occurred a revival of explicitly Marxian social theory struggling to overcome the anti-working class bias of the new left. For both theoretical traditions, the realization that the hitherto quiescent 'new middle class was disproportionately represented in this new militancy revived the question of its place in class analysis, a debate which had opened in Germany in the 1890s and had subsequently flourished among the Austro Marxists.⁶ With considerable attention focussed on what Braverman ambiguously termed the 'middle levels of employment', both the sociological and Marxian approaches appeared to alight on common ground. Despite this mutual concern, these two general approaches are not in all ways compatible. In the following sections, a brief evaluation is offered of several approaches to the analysis of 'new middle classes? in advanced capitalism. Initially, several writers who attempt to build class analyses appropriate for contemporary conditions from explicitly Marxian propositions are discussed. In the second sub-section below attention~ is directed to a theory which centres class analysis around processes of closure. By raising some of the issues discussed by Weber which were insufficiently developed by Marx, this approach attempts to transcend both traditions as part of a general reorientation of social theory.

Class polarisation

The revival of economic workplace and union struggles among 'middle class occupational groups has been interpreted as a confirmation of the traditional Marxist model of class.⁷ Arguing that objective processes of proletarianisation had finally undermined the basis of the superiority of the middle stratum, the new unionism of non-manual workers was interpreted as the outcome of their subjective comprehension of their real class interests. Class polarisation had belatedly occurred in accordance with nineteenth century predictions.

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Empirically, this argument overstates the case and inflates the adoption by some non-manual workers of degrees of militancy into a general rule embracing the entire grouping. Harry Braverman, for example, cites several interesting case studies of the rationalisation of clerical work and then proceeds, partly on this basis, to assign the entire stratum to the working class.⁸ This is to some extent a problem of devising a purely objective conception of social class based on the most advanced tendencies. But Braverman had hesitated to discuss the implications of his analysis on the subjective response of clerical workers(9).⁹ There remain major differences in the consciousness and response of non-manual and manual workers, some of which relates to the virtual absence of this rationalisation in any but the largest factory-like offices.

A second problem with the polarisation model is theoretical: if the non-manual grouping had recently become proletarian, what class position had they occupied hitherto? By implication they were mere classless strata, but with the expansion of the non-manual grouping, this leaves a large body of employees outside class analysis. In short, the proletariat was defined objectively as comprising those who sold their labour power. Proletarianisation, however, was seen not only as the expropriation of the means of production, but as specific changes in the terms of the labour contract: changes in the scale and conditions of work and a decline of real wages. Three distinct notions of the proletarian position tend to run together. One is structural or longer-term occupational changes through which new workers are recruited to the paid labour force. The second is actual proletarianisation which occurs to self-employed petty producers or retailers. The third is a process which occurs to employees affecting the terms of sale of labour power which diminishes responsibility, autonomy or rewards. It is the third of these which can most cogently account for the adoption of new militancy by the middle strata. In the strictly juridical Marxist model of class, however, which is the basis of the polarisation position, this is proletarianisation of the proletariat, a thesis which is only tenable if a radical separation between objective position and subjective response is assumed, a separation which seems to fly in the face of the tenets of the materialist approach.

The service class

In contrast to the 'wage-and-salary- class' perspective above, which avoided the definition of a new middle class, most neo-Marxist class theorists have been less reticent to acknowledge the existence of a new class. These approaches have necessarily to account for the rise of new occupational groupings and for their class placement. Many of the specific themes emphasized by recent theorists were present in the earlier writings of the Austro-Marxists. Karl Renner observed that in the new system of

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organized capitalism the capitalist makes use of paid assistants who gradually take over his functions'. Comprising a body of unproductive workers who 'dispose of the values that have been produced' by the working class, members of this 'service class' performed some of the tasks associated with capital accumulation and were paid salaries which represented a further division of surplus value derived from taxes or duties, establishing for them an improved life style and family situation. The result was a caste- like formation which helped to maintain the system by producing 'law and order for the benefit of the capitalist class and which was opposed to the working class both materially and intellectually'.¹⁰

Three elements in the class definition of the 'surplus class' have become central foci of neo-Marxist theory: the diffusion of the functions of capital to a proliferating host of officials, the unproductive nature of the work performed and the necessary derivation of income from surplus value, and the importance of the 'service class' in reproducing capitalist relations of production.

Unproductive workers

One structuralist approach argues that the rise of a new middle class is a logical outcome of the laws of capital accumulation.¹¹ The economic expansion of industrial capitalism, under-girded by the increase in the production of relative surplus value, yielded a vastly expanded economic surplus from which a host of unproductive workers could be supported. The two primary functions of industrial capitalism, accumulation and production of surplus value, generated a three class model with a new middle class defined as those who were neither owners nor producers, but unproductive workers who subsisted from the surplus generated by productive workers.¹²

Marx had not always been consistent in his use of the terms productive and unproductive labour.¹³ If we conclude, however, that productive labour includes all categories of necessary co-ordinating management, many white-collar workers, engineers and technicians in addition to production workers--those deemed part of the collective labourer--then the division into classes corresponds with the division of capitalism into production and circulation components: industrial and commercial capital. The class distinction within the propertyless is conceived to be vertical, with a class contradiction posited between white-collar workers in industrial and commercial spheres, while by contrast the gamut of employees in industry, from operatives to necessary management, are united in one class.¹⁴ By cutting across occupational categories in different sections of the economy, it becomes difficult to see how the groupings identified coalesce into substantive classes which adopt distinct stands in the

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class struggle, or the separate types of consciousness which could be attributed to each. Empirically it does not help understand actual class alignments and its strict application would divide interests which, on the contrary, require unity. The distinction is problematic because it does not correspond to class as social phenomenon at a less abstract level which is more often horizontal than vertical.

One useful part of the thesis is that it specifies the economic dependency of specific groupings -- both manual and non-manual -- who are employed in service institutions which are not productive of material wealth and must subsist from revenue sources. But this does not imply at all that such subsistence is exploitative nor opposed to the interests of the productive class. Because such industries are dependent on the surplus to a greater or lesser extent, they are sensitive to the vagaries of the capital accumulation process, a situation which produces cross-cutting interests. But there is potential conflict internal to such industries which parallels that found in the industrial sphere. Recognizing the contradictions between the components of the capitalist mode of production is one thing, but it is empirically and theoretically incorrect to assume that class divisions correspond to industrial divisions.

Unproductive workers would predictably respond to class situations ambivalently given their structural position. On the one hand they had distinct interests vis-a-vis capital with regard to their own employment. On the other hand they were differentiated from the working class and were indirect beneficiaries of exploitation. Within its own terms, however, the 'surplus class' theory cannot account for the increased militancy of the non-manual workers. On the contrary, such action is opposed to the interests of the working class which must produce even more surplus to meet the new demands. Within the terms of the theory, proletarianisation would imply a change from unproductive to productive status. To the extent that the 'new middle class' has remained unproductive, changes in their response cannot be related to their class definition -- particularly given that the most substantial increase in militancy has occurred not among non-manual workers in industry but in government service.

Structural ambiguity

An alternative structural explanation explains both the structural ambiguity and accounts for the change in response of the new middle class. In Carchedi's classification, this new class is simultaneously productive and unproductive. With the development of monopoly capitalism, in addition to the separation of legal from economic ownership, the 'global functions of capital' become diffused among a 'complex, hierarchically organized ensemble of people' who perform both the functions of collective labourer (producers of surplus value) and global capitalist (accumulation).

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They receive remuneration which is comprised, in part, of a 'revenue component' and in part of a 'wages component'.¹⁵ Proletarianisation, then, was defined as an increase in the wage-labour component of work and a consequent decrease in the performance of the functions of accumulation. While the forms this correspondence of functions takes is obscure, it can include the tasks of co-ordination (collective labourer) and surveillance (global capitalist).

The 'new middle class', according to this conception, has no interests which are unique but consists of differentiated groupings performing work consisting in various proportions of the two functions of production and accumulation. It is a 'derived class' and can only represent ambivalently the interests of the two 'functions'.¹⁶ In this sense it is a structurally intermediate class.

A second analysis of structural ambiguity is offered by Wright.¹⁷ In his 'new class map', Wright specified three 'class poles' representing the bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the petite bourgeoisie. Intermediate to these poles, numerous ambiguously defined strata were identified, consisting of those who possessed some degree of one of the sources of power, on the one hand those who exercised control over labour power while having no influence over capital allocation (middle managers, supervisory personnel), and on the other hand, those who exercised some degree of control over the instruments of labour (craftsmen or technical employees).¹⁸

Considering the source of ambiguity of technicians, Wright structural ambiguity arises from two analytically separate levels of analysis: the capitalist mode of production (the division between labour and capital), and the social formation (including other modes of organized production). While craftsmen may more reasonably be seen as a survival from a period of greater relative autonomy and independence, amounting to some control over their labour and possession of their tools, technicians are not in a similar position historically and have no connection to a petty bourgeois mode of production. Nevertheless, the degree of autonomy experienced by mental labour in their work is an important element in sustaining a 'middle class' perspective in such groupings.

Given the division of the workforce into three 'real' classes and intermediate strata, Wright's non-exhaustive approach places between forty-three and fifty-six per cent of the American workforce in intermediate positions. In effect, they belong to no class. The question whether we can consider the intermediate grouping a 'new class', and more fundamentally, what would be necessary for them to coalesce into a new class, has been shelved.

Whereas Wright consigns the bulk of clerical work to the proletariat, and therefore cannot account for the different responses of manual and non-manual labour within the terms of his thesis, Carchedi's functionalism implies that, to the extent such

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work performs unproductive work necessary for capital accumulation, their position can never be fully proletarian and their response must remain ambivalent. On the other hand, Wright's analysis can account for the response of technicians. His class analysis posits as one basis for an ambivalent response the retention by some employees of some control over the exercise of their labour power. For Crompton and Gubbay, in their elaboration of Carchedi's approach, employees must exercise control over other labourers to be defined as structurally intermediate. Technicians are defined as part of the collective labourer unless they give orders to subordinates or police the work of others through quality control.¹⁹ Proletarianization, then, entails a process of being divorced from the controlling or surveillance dimensions of their work.²⁰ But this point of view cannot account for the responses of the more or less intellectual workers who possess no form of control other than over their own immediate labour.

Reproductive function

The third element specified by Renner in his depiction of the rise of a new service class' in advanced capitalism was the function performed in reproducing capitalism. According to the Ehrenreichs,²¹ middle managers and professional groups together occupy a distinct class position which is antagonistic to both the dominant class (those who control the large corporations and non-corporate enterprises) and to the working class. The professional-managerial class (designated the PMC) consists of 'salaried mental workers., whose major function in the social division of labour may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations'.²² Since they do not own the means of production and consequently have to sell their labour power, they are in an antagonistic relationship with the employing class.

The PMC is also in an objectively antagonistic relationship with the working class, both historically and contemporarily. They exist by virtue of the expropriation of the productive knowledge once possessed by the working class which subsequently became the 'property' of the PMC and monopolized by them. Second, the PMC functions as the instruments of social control; they comprise a class 'concerned with the reproduction' of capitalism.²³ The 'objective antagonism' between mental and manual workers 'represents a contradiction which is continually nourished by the historical alternative of a society in which mental and manual work are re-united to create whole people'.²⁴

The conceptual (rather than 'objective') alternative of such a potential society unites many forms of contradictions. For example, the socialist mode of production theoretically represents the unity of labour with the instruments and products of

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labour.²⁵ Under capitalism, it is not the relationship between these elements that is antagonistic; rather, it is the class structure that causes alienation and must be overcome to bring about the historical reconciliation. Many other distinctions in capitalist society will, potentially, be overcome in such a society. Sexual and racial divisions come immediately to mind. The conception of an alternative society which overcomes the contradictions of capitalist society is not a basis for determining which of the various contradictions should be considered or express class divisions rather than other kinds of oppression.

The class struggle between the capitalist class and the working class through which the productive skills of the latter were expropriated and subsequently became the 'property' of the PMC as the main beneficiary (though not the main protagonist) of the reorganization of production was not always, or even generally, as overt as that portrayed, for example, by Stone in her account of the steel industry.²⁶ Without doubt, employers attempt to rationalize work directly and in so doing set in motion a process of proletarianisation (in a relative sense) for at least some of the employees involved and predictably elicit defensive reactions. However, the physical imagery employed in the Ehrenreich's depiction is overly dramatic. The process which produced an enlarged complement of specialists was more often structural, involving inter-generational occupational changes.

The PMC comprises workers who meet two criteria: they perform intellectual labour and they function to reproduce capitalist relations. In the broad sense, the selling of labour to capital is reproductive of these relations, which implies that all employees are part of a system of reproduction. More narrowly, the mental workers who apply their knowledge under the direction of capital in productive industries would seem to be in a different position vis-a-vis the reproduction of capitalism than those in more specifically 'reproductive' industries: such as educational or health workers who serve as instruments of social control. Just as there are mental workers who do not function in this reproductive capacity, so too are there employees in the non-productive industries, which are more directly instrumental in reinforcing capitalism, whose 'functions ... are essentially determined by the need to preserve capitalist relations of production,'²⁷ but who are not mental workers. The armed forces and police come readily to mind. In addition, the 'unproductive' groupings such as clerical labour, who derive from the 'function' of capital accumulation, are important for the reproduction of capitalism -- some occupations may even be specific to this mode of production -- yet they meet only one of the criteria specified. As noted above, the question of reproducing a mode of production becomes complicated by the necessity for social reproduction in general and some institutions which specialize in branches of knowledge, such as medicine, are necessary in a non-capitalist system. This implies that these employees would not have

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as specific a generic interest in capitalism as the PNC theory suggests. On the other hand, it does not necessarily imply that their interest must contradict that of the working class (although it certainly may, and the strength of the Ehrenreichs' account is its class theory of the post-revolutionary society in Eastern Europe).

Discussion: Structural interests and response

The neo-Marxian approaches to class have drawn a distinction between the objective aspects of social class and then related differences in consciousness and response to these different positions. Holding a conception of the paramount importance of the structural foundation of class interests, they have attempted to account in theory for the existence of a 'new middle class' (however this is defined) by defining the specificity of its objective interests. The underlying structural basis of the consciousness of the 'white-collar' worker is then sought in this constellation. Concerned initially with a theoretical exposition of relatively abstract social processes which determined a specific, limited number of classes, this abstract formulation was conceived to be an underlying dynamic which determined social processes at less abstract levels. This structural determination could be grasped analytically but could not be immediately apparent to the social observer. The Marxian theory of surplus value was regarded as the model for this approach which derives abstract laws as the most fundamental, though not necessarily the most immediately salient, determinants of social action. However, an immediate weakness in this approach, assuming an adequate analysis of the deepest generic interests, is the absence of a theory to account for less abstract conditions of action. This is especially apparent when the question of consciousness and response is addressed.

Once generic interests were determined, and the class structure could be identified in its objective aspects, there was an empirical and theoretical problem in the transition to the subjective and behavioural aspects of class. Marx had distinguished between a 'class-in-itself' and a 'class-for-itself', the former usually interpreted as corresponding with an objective definition of class and the latter with the realization of complete class consciousness on the part of the class objectively identified. For the proletariat this entailed a class definition of the situation and revolutionary consciousness.²⁸ This was not a general formulation applicable to all classes, however, because the bourgeoisie was incapable of reaching real self-consciousness²⁹ and only the proletariat could become fully aware of its historical mission.³⁰

The neo-Marxists have adopted the objective/subjective dichotomy of class and focused on the former with the object of determining who is going to be on either sides of the revolutionary barricades.³¹ That is, they serve as guides to the formation of

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political alliances. However, insofar as structural analysis purports to uncover the often unacknowledged conditions of action, there should predictably be some correlation between the actual contours of class conflict in society and the structural determinants of class interests. Despite the important insight into these conditions presented by Marx, one of the fundamental difficulties of the Marxian positions discussed above arises from their attempt to extend their analyses beyond a formalistic definition of class interests to embrace self-conscious social collectivities. There is no need to reject, as Cohen and Howard suggest,³² the important insight that class is a 'dynamic result' of the coalescence of real actors 'around common needs and interests', in order to recognize the substantial difficulty involved in the restriction of interests to 'an abstract logic of contradiction of wage labor/capital'³³ both with respect to wider issues of social domination as well as issues specific to interests within the selling of labour power itself.

While for Lindsey, class is solely a matter of abstract functions, and class struggle concerns factors which are 'not covered by social class theory,'³⁴ most Marxist approaches maintain that the crystallisation of class as a social force is related to the generic interests identified. Poulantzas appears to accept the widest discrepancy between objective and subjective factors. Following Althusser, he posited the relative autonomy of political and ideological factors in class placement. His large, unproductive grouping was differentiated from the proletariat, defined as those who produced physical commodities, but did not constitute a 'new class'. Rather they formed a fraction of the petite bourgeoisie because, although their economic position was distinct from this class, it engendered the same political and ideological effects.³⁵ In this respect, Poulantzas accords primacy to ideology over economics in the class determination of the 'new petite bourgeoisie', from which it would seem to follow that through ideological processes alone the unproductive workers could become a 'fraction' of the working class. However, he recognised that the consciousness of the unproductive workers was not purely autonomous, but arose from the actual employment situation of the white-collar stratum: 'social advancement and careerism', as well as other individualistic manifestations, arose logically from their complex work situations. What is missing in this formulation is a systematic understanding of the structural basis of the process by which specific groupings, for material reasons, become 'temporary allies' of other classes; an analysis of the effects of the uneven distribution of work situations and rewards. Abstract theory as a guide to action needs to be supplemented by a theory of more immediate conditions in the selling of labour power.

Carchedi similarly recognised that groupings 'identified' by economic criteria as part of a specific class do not necessarily adopt positions consistent with this identification in their political or ideological practices. Economic identification and

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class definition do not coincide because the former, which is the outcome of an analytically separate process, is an insufficient determinant of the latter. Class definition, he argues, must include political and ideological instances which are beased in the superstructure and in class struggle.³⁶ For example, Carchedi cited the labour aristocracy as a group which is 'identified' by its productive relations as a part of the proletariat. This identification, however, is 'directly modified by the class struggle in the sense that strata of the proletariat become part of the petty bourgeoisie... on political and ideological grounds (and almost inevitably also on grounds of distribution relations'.³⁷ The important role of distribution is never followed through as an element structuring class consciousness at less abstract levels and instead Carchedi produces an intricate and impractical sub- classification of structural positions.

Crompton and Wright also declare political and ideological factors to have relative autonomy. For Wright, 'the extent to which political and ideological relations enter into the determination of class position is itself determined by the degree to which these positions occupy a contradictory location at the level of social relations of production'.³⁸ The more intermediate a class location, the more the ideological and political factors acquire independence in determining the consciousness and response of those who occupy the position. Technicians are cited as a particularly problematic group structurally located in between all three class poles. They can react in distinct ways and take differing stands in the class struggle, Wright argues, because of their ambiguous class location, an argument that does not address systematically the relationship between the specific attributes of the structurally ambiguous position and the response. This approach tends to make the consciousness of the members of those structural positions which are not ambiguous less problematic than they in fact are.

The implication of Crompton's thesis of structurally ambivalent groups is that there should be a connection between the actual degree of ambiguity of a position and the collective response of those who occupy it. Those who perform primarily the functions of capital would express their collective consciousness, if at all, through labour-management committees or staff associations. Those who performed primarily the labour functions would be more likely to adopt varieties of trade unionism.³⁹ As a process, the less ambiguous an employees' position became, the more his response would tend towards the appropriate form of organisation.⁴⁰ While her work on technicians⁴¹ and insurance clerks⁴² reflects this stand, Crompton seems to endorse Wright's argument that the more ambiguous a position, the more ideological and political factors intervene to determine the 'class position of the heterogeneous middle strata'.⁴³

The general factors which form the basis of Wright's and Crompton's analysis -- specifically the authority structure and degrees of relative autonomy in work -- are

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important for an understanding of the conditions eliciting the transformation in the consciousness and response of non-manual workers. There is, however, an absence of theoretical linkages with less abstract conditions and consequences. If economic class is the most fundamental basis of group formation, the culmination of such processes is the engendering of discrete bodies of individuals into a more crystallized grouping, a social class. Among the neo-Marxist approaches, only the Ehrenreichs introduced as a final criterion of class placement the necessity for a coherent social and cultural existence.⁴⁴ With regard to the Professional-Managerial class, this has two effects. First it narrows the breadth of the class by excluding groups such as many clerical or office workers and such semi-professionals as teachers and nurses, who fulfill the other criteria of PMC membership. The largest grouping of reproductive, intellectual workers, then, has no class determination. Second, the life-styles, marriage patterns, culture and life chances of the PMC are shared with the upper levels of the traditional petty bourgeoisie and small employers.⁴⁵ In fact, many professionals, especially those in law, medicine or engineering may still be regarded as part of this old middle class, blurring the distinction between salaried and independent members. However, rather than there being social unity between the PMC and the petty bourgeoisie as a whole, as Szymanski asserts, the professional-managerial group is disconnected from the mass of the this class: small farmers, store-keepers, artisans, independent fishermen, and so on. In short, there is no systematic connection between the sources of class definition outlined in these approaches and the crystallization of social groups.

Market capacity

While neo-Marxists sought to explain the structural basis of the new militancy of the 'middle class' in order to determine the extent to which such action could be regarded as ~progressives, sociological attention was focussed on the broad distinctions in the division of labour under capitalism which were related to the differential responses of manual and non-manual workers. The labour market was regarded as the crucial mediating institution which defined the 'class position' of groups of employees and structured the more immediate interests around which social actors mobilized.⁴⁶

The most significant sociological approach in recent years has been that developed by Giddens. Giddens rejects the subject/object dichotomy which is at the core of the neo-Marxist theories of class. In contrast to a model which differentiates sharply between an 'objective' analysis of class and a subsequent subjective 'crystallization', Giddens conflates the two in his concept of structuration.⁴⁷ In this view a class is by definition a self-conscious entity, not in the sense that it is aware of its generic interests as in the usual interpretation of a class-for-itself, but in that it manifests a common

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consciousness, distinct to itself, even if this consciousness consists of a denial of the reality of classes (which, he claims, characterizes the new middle class).⁴⁸

Consistent with Ciddens' overall theoretical approach, which regards society as the skilled creation of individual actors within the context of differential resources, unconscious motivations and unintended consequences, class emerges on the basis of the possession of unequal resources which actors mobilize for their use in market encounters with others in the pursuit of what they conceive to be their economic interests. Giddens recognizes three basic modes of property ownership, or three types of market capacity: ownership of productive property, the possession of educational or technical qualifications, and the capacity to labour. These clusters of resources form the basis of classes to the extent that there is a high degree of mobility closure between them ('mediate structuration'). Given such a situation, a three-class model is generic to industrial capitalism.⁴⁹

The actual formation of more or less coherent and self-conscious (or commonly conscious) classes on this three-fold basis, however, is obscured to the degree mobility is open in the advanced societies. It is necessary to study three types of "proximate structuration": the division of labour within the enterprise, the authority structure and the influence of distributive groupings.⁵⁰ These elements, with the addition of relations "involved in the linkages between productive organizations within commodity and labour markets" were conflated in the concept "relations of production" and, Giddens argues, it is important to distinguish them.

In contrast to Weber, for whom only one of these four relations - market linkages - was at the core of his theory of class,⁵¹ Giddens proposes to reject the thesis which equates class situation with market situation as well as the "general thesis that class divisions and class conflict are phenomena of market relations".⁵² In his theory of structuration, class divisions are based on the productive system⁵³ and the limited number of classes are engendered as distinguishable formations "to the extent to which the various bases of mediate and proximate class structuration overlap".⁵⁴ All four factors must be considered as inter-corrected rather than as aggregates. Giddens' theory links both long-term structural and more immediate interests in the selling of labour power in one comprehensive theory and consequently accounts more directly for consciousness and response than the neo-Marxist approaches which restricted class analysis to abstract functions. This is especially important when the concern is with the central contours of class struggle which relate, in a direct fashion, with immediate interests.

The theory of structuration begins with the actual encounter of actors possessing different resources or "capacities of action" determined by their scarcity value" and builds from this a theory of social interaction through which they are reproduced. A

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theory of reproduction is important for an understanding of the dynamics within which classes are formed, not solely as abstract “positions” but as concrete historical forces. Market capacities, processes of closure,⁵⁵ and other cross-cutting features are significant for analysing how social class crystallizes on a national scale. Given a number of salient cross-cutting features which do not reinforce the class structure which would emerge based on a structural analysis, then social classes will coalesce only partially both in terms of consistent entities with historical continuity and in terms of specific class ideologies and consciousness. Although North American and European societies have similar occupational distributions, the less overt middle class/working class distinction in the former may be related to the importance of ethnic or racial differences,⁵⁶ (although in Canada ethnic divisions are considerably correlated with socio-economic status.⁵⁷ In addition, the formation of a more rather than less self-conscious “new middle class” is significantly related to the degree of organization of the working class: a conception of middle classes would be more sharply differentiated when the manual workers are more crystallized as a social movement.

Within the terms of Giddens own thesis, however, there remains the question of the extent to which classes are “structured”. Giddens recognized that the concept of market capacity yielded an “indefinite multiplicity” of interests and that there was a problem of theoretical transition to the actual classes any society would have.⁵⁸ For Giddens, classes are simultaneously theoretical constructs and empirical entities which manifest a common consciousness, but the extent to which coherent, qualitative breaks in the social structure exist - the degree of overlap between “mediate” and “proximate structuration” -- would seem to be problematic and not given in the mere formulation of salient elements.

Parkin has modified his initial position,⁵⁹ which postulated a sharp distinction between manual and non-manual workers, since significant changes in response has occurred with no changes in the non-manual character of the work.⁶⁰ For Dahrendorf, while processes have tended to dissolve class unity, the “new middle class” was “born decomposed”. With the fragmentation of conflict groupings, it is “highly doubtful whether the concept of class is still applicable”.⁶¹ For Weber, manual workers approximated in social class to the extent that they possessed identical market situations, possession of minimal competence capable of short-term, on-the-job training. Aron accepted that the 19th century was the nearest to a model of a class, and that semi-skilled manual workers are still the closest approximation. However, the decline of the manual working class and the ~ of variegated service occupations had weakened to the point of extinction, class itself. In short, distinctions between groups within the non-manual and manual groupings may be as great as those between these two categories. At the level of market relations immediate interests are often occupationally or

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industrially specific and produce an intricate crosscutting of particularisms which may emerge collectively in the form of several labour bodies or may not so emerge and express the relative autonomy of specialists with appropriate qualifications.

From the perspective of the neo-Marxist approaches, the analysis of class begins at a higher level of abstraction with a general theory of exploitation in the capitalist mode of production. However much power relations are dualistic in nature, the question of ownership of the material resources of production, as distinct from personal skills, and the corresponding legal rights to appropriate the finished product or the returns from the provision of a service, determines that the relationship is both asymmetrical and exploitative. The crucial distinction between Giddens and the neo-Marxist perspectives emerges in the contrast between this conception of the fundamentally antagonistic economic distinction between wage-labour and capital, and Giddens' notion that the class difference between those who have control over productive property and those who have nothing to sell but their labour power is the equivalent of the difference between those who have differential skills on the labour market.

With its emphasis on the view that the primary contradiction of capitalist society is that between private appropriation and social production, Giddens' forthcoming study of advanced capitalism may provide the basis for a class theory, which begins with the centrality of the private ownership of capital and focuses first on the mechanisms of exploitation in the capitalist mode of production. By systematic use of the components of the "relations of production" such a theory could situate the particular interests of the "new middle class" within the boundaries of the primary contradiction. However, this would violate Giddens' conflation of subjective/objective processes and the link between structural interests and crystallization.⁶² While more sociologically orthodox, it may be appropriate to proceed from the opposite direction to Giddens' study: from the determination of structural interests in the relations of production to the social crystallization, of classes.

Conclusion

In *Capital*, Marx began his analysis with the study of commodity exchange and the commodity form of labour process in capitalist society. While his approach delved beneath the surface phenomena to explain their underlying structural conditions, it also implied that appearances, while reflecting these underlying patterns were neither absolute expressions of them nor simply socially illusory. The acceptance by the workers of the alienation of the product which embodied their social labour, the acceptance of the authority of the capitalist, the perception of the exchange of

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equivalents in the labour contract -- all are mere “appearances”. But social action is immediately oriented to such appearances. If it is accepted that such phenomena are not necessarily accurate reflections of underlying processes, although to comprehend them you must analyse their structural properties, it follows that you cannot understand social action which relates to these appearances solely or the basis of abstract formulation and structural tendencies. Interested social action is not oriented only, or even primarily in the usual run of affairs, to generic interests. In the capitalist mode of production the selling of labour power is the crucial mediating institution; it is the immediate relationship of labour to capital and should be taken into consideration when analysing the immediate class struggle, the differentiated responses of particular groups of employees relative to the terms of their labour contract, whether this takes the form of individualistic strategies or collective responses such as trade unions.

Class theory must come to grips with the existence of a “new middle class” and with the question of its class interests in the context of the primary contradiction of the capitalist mode of production. Beyond the usefulness of an analytic distinction between classes as defined by economic position or interests and social classes which are groups with common social characteristics, the class definition of a grouping is not only a theoretical question but corresponds empirically to qualitative breaks in the division of labour. It entails a systematic link between structural conditions rooted in the relations of production and social crystallization. The crucial dichotomy is that between property and propertylessness, however the relations of productive embrace more than this and the authority structure is of particular importance. In order to relate these processes to the formation of concrete social groupings the mediation of the labour market must be introduced. By specifying some of the elements in the social relations of production” Giddens widens the conception of immediate interests beyond the economic returns received in the market encounter. The definition of capitalism as a distinct mode of production is bound up with the commodity nature of labour. It is through the mediation of the labour market that immediate interests are determined and occupational groups are stratified. In addition to the “price of labour power” the terms of the labour contract concern the crucial area of the conditions of employment. They involve the issue of control over the labour power of others and emphasize the qualitatively distinct relations involved in the subordination of labour to capital rather than only the quantitative differential in returns expected by those who possess greater assets or resources. This focus on the emergence of immediate interests is especially important when the question of concern is the emergence of class consciousness, particularly when consciousness is related to the development of trade unionism which is an institution which primarily relates to the shorter-range interests.

The strength of the neo-Marxist approaches is their foundation and the primary

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importance afforded the structurally determined relations of production. These generic interests do structure the terms and conditions of employment, but this connection is by no means unmediated. The emphasis placed by neo-Marxists on ideological and political intervention is an important independent element determining class consciousness, but this consciousness exists in degrees which are qualitatively different. The alienation of the worker from the product and from the process of production -- the point of departure for a theory of exploitation -- do structure the framework of social consciousness and action, but except in the case of direct proletarianisation (in its classic sense of a loss of productive property), class consciousness may not easily grasp these generic interests. More immediate class consciousness takes the form of attempts to control the labour contract emphasizing the commodity nature of labour power in capitalism. The strength of the sociological analyses is the search for systematic, objective factors in the terms and conditions of labour (which can and must be related to a more abstract theory of exploitation in capitalism) which can be related to observed class consciousness and class conflict over immediate objectives. Giddens approach is useful because it specifies some of these objective processes although the mode of analysis more appropriately flows from the abstract to the concrete, rather than from actors' consciousness and actions, as in the tradition of sociology followed by Giddens.

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